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Evolution of the Feminist Movement in Japan

Machiko Matsui

Mitsu Tanaka, a distinguished leader of *uuman libu* (women's liberation), the radical feminists in the early 1970s, stated:

Libbers are not simply cross with the general man society. What I want is not a man or a child. I want to have a stronger soul with which I can burn myself out either in heartlessness or in tenderness. Yes, I want a stronger soul.¹

Despite being ridiculed or trivialized by male critics and journalists, her fiery statements became popular and later formed a manifesto of the contemporary Japanese feminist movement.² Why did Tanaka's seemingly extremely personal statements gain such popular support? Tanaka spoke for the majority of women whose voices had been muted and unheard. Paradoxically, her adherence to personal experiences made her statements more universal than any based on a theoretical framework. Her traumatic experiences of rape at the age of eight, a broken family, her encounter with sexism in the work place, her involvement in the anti-Vietnam War movement, and deep disappointment with male radical politics were shared by many other women of her generation.

Tanaka's emphasis on women as individuals with strong souls and spirits, rather than as devoted wives and self-sacrificing mothers inspired me most. This was a movement for women's self-expression, self-affirmation, self-realization, self-determination, and self-emancipation, not a movement for the abstract concept of the proletariat or the exploited. In short, women were themselves in the forefront of the movement, although the *uuman libu* feminists eagerly sought a coalition with other

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¹ I would like to thank Chizuko Ueno, professor at Seika University, and Fukuko Kobayashi, professor at Waseda University, who gave me helpful information on current issues for Japanese women in the 1980s. It is due to inspiring conversations with these prominent Japanese feminist scholars that I have completed this paper. Mitsu Tanaka, "Inochi no Tsuyosa ga Hoshii" (I want a strong spirit), trans. and cited by Dorothy Robins-Mowry in *Hidden Sun* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983), 137.

² At the age of 27, Mitsu Tanaka published her autobiography, *Inochi no Onna-tachie* (For my spiritual sisters) (Tokyo: Tabata shoten, 1972), which became a manifesto for contemporary feminism.

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oppressed groups such as pollution victims, the weak, the poor, and the disabled.

What distinguished Tanaka and the *uuman libu* feminist movement from existing women's movements was their demand for the recognition of self and female sexuality. In her autobiography, Tanaka stated: "Women's Liberation should be fought as liberation of our own eros."³ In this respect, the new wave feminist movement in the early 1970s was a legitimate daughter of the late Meiji feminist movement, the Seito (Bluestocking) movement, which sought for women's expression of their inner selves and dealt in literary form with issues of sexuality such as abortion and prostitution.⁴ Raicho Hiratsuka, the founder of the Seito, proclaimed:

In the beginning woman was the sun.
She was a true person.
Now woman is the moon.
She depends on others for her life.
And reflects the light of others.
She is sickly as a wan, blue-white moon.
We, completely hidden sun, must restore ourselves.
We must reveal the hidden sun—our concealed genius.
This is our constant cry and the inspiration of our unified
purpose.
The climax of the cry, this thirst, this desire will impel
the genius in ourselves to shine forth.⁵

Tanaka, like Hiratsuka, emphasized the spiritual and creative strength of women as individuals.

In this report I will describe the emergence of the contemporary Japanese feminist movement in the early 1970s, as well as address how and why it started, and I will review its evolution during the past two decades, specifically, the problems with coalition building.

From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, universities became centers of various social movements, such as those which opposed the security

³ Tanaka, *Inochi no Onna-tachie*, 309.

⁴ The Seito (Bluestocking) movement is acknowledged as the awakening of feminist consciousness in Japan. The group, led by Raicho Hiratsuka, was comprised of upper-middle-class, intellectual, young women. Following the British model of the Bluestocking movement, in 1911 they began publishing the literary magazine *Seito*. Although their focus was on the development of individual women's literary and intellectual talents, the group's criticism of the patriarchal Meiji society and its *ie* system (a patrilineal extended family system based on the rule of primogeniture) paved the way for the later feminist movement. On the Seito feminists, see Sharon Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983).

⁵ Raicho Hiratsuka, "Proclamation of Emancipation," trans. by Robins-Mowry in *Hidden Sun*, 66.

treaty between the United States and Japan and opposed the Vietnam War, as well as those which supported civil rights, anti-pollution, and counterculture movements. People began to question and criticize the outcome of the “miracle” economic development of the 1960s. People became conscious of the oppressed and exploited: pollution victims in Minamata, confiscated peasants in Sanrizuka, Korean Japanese, Ainu, Okinawans, and traditionally mistreated outcast *burakumin*, all of whom were left behind by the “benefits” of Japan’s modernization.⁶

The new wave feminist movement, an extension of the counterculture movement, protested against the outcome of postwar industrialization. The feminist movement, as well as the anti-pollution movement, raised questions over rapid industrialization that valued only efficiency at the expense of other human values. Feminists claimed that women were one of the most oppressed groups because of their reproductive functions, which were regarded as handicaps in an industrial society that valued productivity.

Women were active in a variety of radical movements. Like American women in the late 1960s, however, Japanese women were discriminated against in the new left movements and were usually excluded from the decision-making process, thought of as housekeepers or sex objects. Sexism prevailed in male-initiated “revolutionary” organizations. Under the strong influence of Marxism in new left politics, the woman question was generally neglected. Although Marxism gave women a powerful tool to analyze the social structure, it was too often regarded as a panacea for all social evils, including women’s problems. At that time, women did not have the language to articulate sexism. If we raised the question, we were immediately stigmatized as petty-bourgeois: revolution first, women’s liberation second. The latter would be realized automatically once the former was established. The Nara Women’s University, one of two national women’s universities, employed few female administrators and female professors, yet, combatting sexism was not on the agenda in the Marxist student circle.

In 1971 I spent a summer in Nagano and accidentally came across the first women’s liberation conference, organized by Tanaka’s group and held in a small resort village surrounded by quiet mountains. People in the village were astonished by the nude women in the forest who were holding protest meetings against sexism! I was frightened, too. Since then “uuman libu” became a popular term in the Japanese mass media. The conference was severely ridiculed as an event conceived by crazy and hysterical women. Yet, when I later read the document which

⁶ For Japanese feminists’ analysis of their relationship with other social movements, see Task Force, eds., *Japanese Women Speak Out: White Paper on Sexism in Japan* (Tokyo: Tokyo International, 1975).

resulted from their heated discussions at the conference, I was deeply moved by their seriousness, frankness, and keen criticism of sexism in family, work, society, and even revolutionary organizations.⁷ This was my first encounter with feminism, and where I came to know my frustration was shared by many other women involved in various social movements at that time.

Thus the contemporary Japanese feminist movement was launched by a small minority of radical women activists who had previously been involved in other progressive movements. The new left movement gave women a training ground for political activities by its emphasis on voluntarism, individualism, and on the process rather than the goal of the movement. They insisted that to change the society, individuals must change. Contemporary feminists went much further and were much more serious than the new left in terms of their pursuit of personal politics, especially concerning the relationship between the sexes. In the early 1970s the translation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* opened up our eyes to the issue of women's sexuality, and for the first time the Japanese feminists raised the question of women's sexuality as a core of their oppression. Women's right to control their own bodies was now a prerequisite for their self-determination.

The women's liberation movement became widespread in urban areas throughout Japan. In Tokyo, Tanaka Mitsu's group, Fighting Women, opened the Shinjuku Liberation Center, which functioned as a core of the movement, disseminating information on contraceptive technology, providing shelter for rape victims and battered women, and offering counseling services for women seeking abortion or divorce. In major cities a number of small grass-roots women's groups were organized in the form of women's bookstores, craftshops, coffeehouses, restaurants, study groups, and feminist journals, such as *Onna Erosu* (Women's eros), *Agora*, and *Feminist*, began to appear.

Unlike the American feminist movement in the early 1970s, however, these women's groups in Japan were unable to build a national organization like the National Organization for Women (NOW), which included middle-class housewives and professionals. The Japanese grass-roots movements remained sporadic without a national body to unite them. Rather, deep resentment existed towards an organized movement among the feminists who had previously been disappointed by new left politics. The numerous small sects of the new left student organizations, exclaiming their orthodoxy, attacked each other incessantly in order to establish hegemony. The *uuman libu* feminists tried not to repeat the same mistake. Their demand for a nonhierarchical and nonstructural

⁷ See Aki Shobo, ed., *Seisabetsu no Kokuhatsu* (Protest against sexism) (Tokyo: Aki shobo, 1971).

group without leadership, however, gave the movement a lively anarchist spirit but made it extremely difficult to broaden its base. Their anti-intellectualism also made it difficult to develop a comprehensive theory to guide the movement.

In 1972 the conservative government, which had been ruling Japan since the end of World War II, proposed the revision of the Eugenic Protection Law (EPL), which allowed Japanese women to have abortions. The law was aimed at preventing the reproduction of an inferior population carrying hereditary diseases. This law inherited the spirit of the National Eugenic Law, the purpose of which was to preserve the purity of the Yamato race during the war years. Under the slogan "Give Birth and Multiply," women were forced to bear children who could serve the war for the Emperor. In addition Article 212 of the 1907 Criminal Law made abortion a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment. The National Eugenic Law permitted abortion only to save a mother's life and to eliminate genetic defects. The 1948 law simply extended this by recognizing rape, hereditary illness, and cases where the mother's life would be threatened by pregnancy or birth as legitimate grounds for abortion. The revision in 1949 made abortion available when a pregnancy or birth might endanger the health of the mother because of physical or economic reasons. In 1952 the administrative procedure for obtaining an abortion was simplified. Only the approval of a certified physician was required. As a result the provision has been left to interpretation by physicians. Thus married women were guaranteed, in essence, abortion on demand.

In 1953 the figure for reported abortions jumped to over one million.⁸ The birth rate drastically declined from 3.65 in 1950 to 2.0 in 1960.⁹ Since the rapid economic development in the 1960s, a severe labor shortage has become an issue among business circles; thus in 1972 the Japanese government tried to eliminate the clause concerning economic reasons for abortions. At present the EPL permits abortions only on certain grounds; in other cases the Criminal Law applies.

The *uuman libu* feminists organized a vigorous campaign against the revision of EPL and successfully stopped the proposal from passing in the Diet (the Japanese legislature). At the same time, they demanded that the anti-abortion clause in the Criminal Law and EPL itself be abolished. Further these feminists demanded an alternative law which guarantees every woman access to information and education on contraception, family planning services, and safe and legal abortions as part

⁸ Yoshiko Nagano, "Abortion Struggle in Japan," in *Japanese Women Speak Out*, 87.

⁹ Fujin Kyoiku Kenkyu-kai (FKK), *Tokei ni Miru Josei no Genjo* (The current status of women in statistics) (Tokyo: Kakiuchi shuppan, 1987), 14.

of normal medical care. They insisted that such a law would support women's reproductive freedom as a basic human right.¹⁰

As these feminists posited, Japanese women's wombs had been controlled by the state through the Criminal Law; furthermore, Japanese women did not have access to reliable contraceptives. The IUD was prohibited until 1974 and then allowed only for therapeutic reasons. The pill is also obtainable only for therapeutic reasons with a physician's prescription. Female-controlled barrier methods such as diaphragms and cervical caps are simply unknown or unavailable to a majority of women. At present 75 percent of female contraceptive users depend on condoms.¹¹ Taking account of the unequal relationship between the sexes, it is easy to assume that women, especially inexperienced teenagers, often fail to ask their partners to use condoms, which helps explain the current increase of teenage abortions.¹² In Japan abortion is, not surprisingly, used as a complement to contraceptives. Hence feminists have demanded adequate sex education and safe and reliable contraceptives for women.

Postwar family planning, largely controlled by men, is based on a prewar eugenic ideology. Although some feminists, like Shizue Kato, fought for the availability of contraceptives to protect the institution of motherhood, their voices were overwhelmed by male medical professionals who were concerned about their own interests rather than those of women. And Kato's stance, unlike that of the *uuman libu* feminists, was, like her mentor Margaret Sanger, based on the Victorian notion of voluntary motherhood stemming from neo-Malthusianism.¹³

For the first time, the contemporary "uuman libu" feminists criticized the clearly discriminatory aspects of eugenics ideology that fostered the EPL. They claimed that, by denying the right of the disabled to live, the law discriminates against the disabled. In a society where the disabled are forced to sterilize themselves, women cannot have reproductive freedom, the right to choose whether or not to have children. Such a society only values efficiency and productivity and neglects other human

¹⁰ On the Japanese feminist movement for abortion rights in the 1970s, see Nagano, "Abortion Struggle in Japan." Yuko Aida gives a more up-to-date account of the movement in "Family Planning and Women's Human Rights," *Asian Women's Liberation: Asian Women and Population Policy* no. 7 (1986): 11–15.

¹¹ Betsy Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 252.

¹² According to the Ministry of Health statistics, the number of reported abortions has decreased drastically from 1.2 million in 1955 to .6 million in 1982. Yet, the number of teenage abortions has increased from 14,000 to 24,000 during the same period. Nihon Fujin Dantai Kyogi-kai (NFDK), ed., *Fujin Hakusho* (White paper on women) (Tokyo: Sodobunka sha, 1984), 157.

¹³ For a brief account of Kato's relationship with Sanger in the birth control movement, see Robins-Mowry, *Hidden Sun*, 73–76.

values. In this way, these feminists criticized the postwar industrial values in Japan. Their criticism formed the basis for a coalition with the movement for the disabled, as well as with other progressive movements, such as the environmental protection and human rights movements.

Since then the government has proposed the revision of the EPL several times but has failed each time because of massive feminist campaigns. In 1982 yet another revision bill was submitted to the Diet based on the strong support of the Seicho No Ie (Family for the growth of life), a right-wing Shinto fundamentalist organization, which aimed to revive the *ie*—the patriarchal extended family system. Women who had been active in the national and regional movements for women's liberation, peace, and anti-pollution founded a coalition group, the Yusei-Hogo-Ho Kaiaku Soshi Renmei (League against the revision of the eugenic protection law). Various women's groups such as the Asian Women's Association, the International Women's Year Action Group, the Women's Democrat Club, the Group for Equal Wage, the Crisis Service Group against Rape, and the Group to Frame Our Employment Equality Law, among others participated in the League.

In these women's groups, unlike the existing leftist organizations where policy was decided in a top-down bureaucratic manner, women employed feminist horizontal approaches for organizing on a voluntary basis. Without a national umbrella group, women organized themselves spontaneously by regions. A series of meetings opposing the revision of ELP was held in major cities throughout Japan and drew hundreds to thousands of women. The movement successfully stopped passage of the revision bill in 1983. Thus the issue of abortion, a common issue for women of diverse backgrounds, became the critical issue to integrate these women's groups into a mass movement.

As a consequence of the miracle economic development in the 1960s, Japan was transformed into an advanced capitalist society, marked by rapid urbanization and an increase in the number of nuclear families. For the first time in Japanese history, the full-time housewife, a role that had been considered a luxury for upper- and middle-class women, became commonplace. In the early 1970s the notion of a "breadwinner-husband" and a "housekeeper-wife" was widely established. The majority of women who worked outside the home were young and unmarried. Middle-class wives stayed at home and basked in the illusion of matriarchy by holding the family purse strings and controlling their children's education in neatly decorated suburban homes. Japanese women in the early 1970s were, therefore, at the stage of white middle-class American women in the 1950s, as depicted by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*.

Nevertheless, by the late 1970s, an increasing number of housewives left their homes to seek paid employment. Since single incomes were

no longer adequate to sustain a family's average living standard, especially after the oil crisis, part-time working wives became the norm. Japanese capitalists also turned to housewives in order to overcome the shortage of young unskilled and semiskilled workers. In 1975 women over the age of thirty made up 57 percent of female workers. By 1979 the figure of married female workers had skyrocketed to 67 percent, including widows and divorced women. In 1983 working wives outnumbered full-time housewives. Currently 60 percent of housewives work outside the home. Thus the pattern of women's participation in the labor force significantly changed from that of young unmarried women to middle-aged married women. Today 40 percent of Japan's work force is made up of women.¹⁴

In the 1980s one of the major issues for Japanese feminists was the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1985. This bill was proposed by the government, which, after International Women's Year, was under increasing international pressure to eliminate apparent sex discrimination. Feminists, however, as well as all the progressive parties strongly opposed the bill. While it prohibited discriminatory practices in training, welfare benefits, retirement, and dismissal policies, it called on companies to "make efforts" to treat female workers equally in recruitment, hiring, position, assignment, and promotion. There were no enforceable policies or penalties in these areas. The law without viable enforcement made little sense.

Further, the EEOL curtailed protective regulations such as menstrual leave, and prohibited overtime, night work, and heavy and dangerous physical labor for women. It forced women to choose either protection or equality. Under this law, female executives and professionals were totally excluded from any protective regulations in return for equal treatment. For example, the average working hours of Japanese female workers are three hundred to four hundred hours per year more than those of West German workers.¹⁵ Even an average part-time female worker, who make up 20 percent of the female labor force, work six hours a day, five days a week, and earn only 76 percent of the average pay of full-time female workers.¹⁶ Feminists were opposed to this law because it would cause the polarization of elite, well-off female professionals, who would be without protection, and the majority of female workers, who need protection.

¹⁴ These statistics are cited in Rodosho Fujin-kyoku (Ministry of labor, women's bureau), *Fujin Rodo no Jitsujō* (The situation of women's work) (Tokyo: Okurasho insatsu-kyoku, 1986).

¹⁵ Michiko Nakajima, *Hataraku Onna ga Mirai o Tsukuru* (Working women open up our future) (Tokyo: Aki shobo, 1984), 42.

¹⁶ Nobuko Hashimoto, "Japanese Women in Male Society," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 January 1985, 16–17.

The group *Watashi-tachi no Koyo Byodo Ho o Tsukuru Kai* (Group to frame our employment equality law), founded in 1978, proposed their own equality law which ensured as basic human rights the right to work and the right to have children. Ultimately they hoped that the improvement of all working conditions, by the extension of protective laws for women to both sexes, would ensure men's participation in child-rearing. Unfortunately the feminist proposal was defeated. The EEOL as proposed by the government, passed in the Diet in 1985. The group's movement, however, considerably raised interest in employment equality for women. Despite the serious lack of enforcement, the EEOL, which went into effect in 1986, may have a positive impact on women's employment. According to the Ministry of Labor survey of more than six hundred companies in 1986, 80 percent of those, compared to only 36 percent of the same companies surveyed in 1985, indicated they planned to recruit both male and female university graduates for the following spring.¹⁷

Outside these feminist movements, middle-class housewives whose husbands could afford to provide time and resources for them, became active in voluntary-based community activities like caring for the sick, the elderly, and the disabled. They have become eager participants in various grass-roots movements concerning issues such as antinuclear power, ecology, peace, and consumer activism. These middle-class housewives, no longer satisfied with obtaining nominal happiness in their alienated suburban homes, have become socially conscious and have tried to build an alternative way, separate from traditional blood and regional ties, to networking among women.¹⁸

In the late 1980s, immediately after the Chernobyl incident, a massive antinuclear movement emerged based on a deeply rooted, historical antinuclear sentiment among the Japanese. The movement became widespread and reached the rural population, which had traditionally been a constituency of the conservative government. Mass demonstrations have been held in remote villages where nuclear power plants were planned. In 1988 the Aomori prefectural government was confronted with a series of demonstrations against the government's decision to establish a new nuclear disposal factory for radio-active waste from all thirty-six nuclear power plants in Japan. Women have been at the forefront of these antinuclear movements, as rural farmers' wives participate actively with urban middle-class wives.

¹⁷ Rodosho Fujin-kyoku, *Fujin Rodo no Jitsujō* (Tokyo: Okurasho insatsukyoku, 1987), 36.

¹⁸ On the housewives' movements, see Chizuko Ueno's analysis in "Genesis of the Urban Housewife," *Japan Quarterly* 34 (Spring 1984): 130-42.

Nevertheless, unlike the feminist movement, these movements are often considered extensions of traditional feminine roles, notably motherhood, in which women are supposed to care for children, the sick, and the poor. A women's movement carried on by women in their roles as wives and mothers, and hence remaining in the traditional women's sphere, acts as a safety valve for society and is always legitimized. Voluntary activities are welcomed by the local governments which try to reduce the cost of welfare. Once women step outside of the boundaries and define womanhood beyond the separate sphere, they are ridiculed, trivialized, and stigmatized. The desire to express their inner selves and their self-determination, the foremost signs of individualism, keenly jeopardizes the foundation of patriarchy. In a society like Japan, therefore, where maternalism has a long tradition, the women's movement still needs to transcend the traditional notion of feminine qualities based on an ideology of separate spheres.

Such active participation of women in various grass-roots movements, however, shows the rising level of women's consciousness along with the changing socioeconomic circumstances surrounding them. Since the late 1970s, the feminist movement has reached the academy, which has been traditionally a male preserve. As career goals become important to young women, more of them are looking for colleges as opportunities for obtaining job-related knowledge and training. The proportion of women entering coeducational rather than women's universities and choosing nontraditional fields such as law, political science, economics, and engineering is increasing gradually. And in the junior colleges, a substantial decrease in the proportion of women majoring in home economics, accompanied by an increase in those pursuing teacher-training and health-related education has occurred.¹⁹

The establishment of women's studies courses in junior colleges is an attempt to attract the younger generation. Courses concerning women's history, women's literature, women's anthropology, women's roles and status in contemporary society, and Western and Japanese feminism have been offered in many colleges. According to the statistics, ninety-four women's studies courses were offered in seventy-five colleges in 1983, and the number has increased significantly; in 1986, 204 courses were offered in 117 colleges.²⁰ In an effort to make women's studies a life-long education, women's studies associations were established in Tokyo and Kyoto by concerned feminist scholars who were actively promoting

¹⁹ Kumiko Fujimura, "Women's Education in Japan," in *Bibliography of Women's Education*, ed. Gail Kelly (New York: Greenwood Press, forthcoming), gives a precise account of the current changes in women's education in Japan.

²⁰ FKK, *Tokei ni Miru Josei no Genjo*, 39.

feminist scholarship as well as the establishment of study groups that included housewives and workers.

In the 1980s *feminism* has become a somewhat legitimate term among Japanese intellectuals. Major scholarly journals have begun to include articles on feminism. A number of male intellectuals who heretofore did not pay attention to women's issues now show off their regard for feminism as a sign of their "progressivism." This trend seems to parallel the spread of women's studies programs throughout Japanese colleges. By being legitimized both inside and outside academia, however, feminism seems to be losing the radical spirit which Tanaka and her group demonstrated in the early 1970s. Some feminists have withdrawn from the actual movement to an ivory tower of academicians.

Like American feminists in the 1980s, Japanese feminists now confront the problem of how to integrate academic pursuits and activism. In the 1980s feminists have started to conceptualize the issues raised by the women's liberation movement in the 1970s through active debates. They have tried to locate the development of Japanese feminism in cultural, social, and historical contexts of Japanese society. Some feminists posit that the Japanese feminist emphasis on communalism, naturalism, and maternalism are countervalues against the results of rapid modernization. In their view, these characteristics of Japanese feminism are effective as criticisms of industrialism but because of their antimodernist slant are always in danger of being guided by fascism. Most prewar Japanese feminists could not resist the fascist government, which used motherhood to mobilize women into the war. The celebration of motherhood was a double-edged sword. Emphasizing communal maternalism as a Japanese tradition, fascist ideologues praised patriotic mothers who sacrificed their sons for the sake of the state. Japanese feminists inclined toward supporting World War II, hoping women's participation in the war would raise their status; for example, a prominent feminist historian, Itsue Takamura, became one of the influential fascist ideologues in the 1930s. Feminists in the 1980s are trying to clarify how the feminist stress on maternalism was related to the formation of fascism.

They also try to articulate the nature of women's oppression in Japanese culture by examining the Emperor and the patriarchal *ie* (patrilineal, extended family) systems. Since 1868, under the restored Emperor structure, patriarchal values have been reinforced in order to transfer family loyalty to the Emperor by identifying Emperor-loyalty with filial piety. The nation is regarded as a large extended family sanctified by the "sacred and inviolable" Emperor-patriarch. In such a system women and children are deprived of their rights and subordinated to the patriarch.

The sophistication of feminist theory in the 1980s is a necessary development of the nascent activism in the 1970s. Without theory, the

movement does not have its foundation. Yet, without an actual movement, theory often becomes a toy for an unnecessarily complex intellectual game. Japanese feminists have now reached the stage of developing a theoretical framework that integrates different women's groups and movements. The further challenges faced by Japanese feminists include reaching out to working-class women, women of minority groups, such as Japanese-Korean and the outcast *burakumin*; making an alliance with other progressive movements without the loss of women's self-determination and self-realization; and raising feminist consciousness and integrating feminist demands in other progressive movements.

Moreover, Japanese feminists have reached the point of seeking coalitions with feminists in other countries. In 1975, International Women's Year, the Japanese women's movement reached a turning point. Umbrella organizations, such as the International Women's Year Action Group and the Asian Women's Association, which aimed to work as a liaison with international feminist movements, were established. The International Women's Year Action Group (WYAG) founded by women professionals is equivalent to NOW in the U.S. According to a 1980 report, this organization had nine hundred members and was divided into groups concerned with housewives, women's education, divorce, work, children's literature, single women, mass media, and international feminism.²¹ Notable female professionals, politicians, writers, artists, and professors participated in this group. As a result, despite the small number of members, WYAG has had a significant impact on mass media. The group has focused on sexism in mass media and made considerable success in stopping sexist commercials on TV. In the late 1980s, it has been organizing an antipornography campaign to eliminate distorted images of female sexuality from mass media.

The Asian Women's Association, a more politically radical organization, was launched by women professionals, workers, and students. According to the 1980 report, the Association had five hundred members and met monthly to study Asian women's issues especially in relation to Japan's economic invasion.²² The association was founded on 1 March 1977, a date commemorating the 1919 uprising of Korean women and men for independence from Japanese colonial rule. Upon its establishment the association declared:

Japanese women have been collaborators in Japan's aggression in other Asian countries for over a hundred years. The present struggles of the women in these countries make this fact even clearer to us. In the past,

²¹ Vera Mackie, Diana Bethel, and Anne L. Blasing, "Women's Groups in Japan: An Overview of Major Groups," *Feminist International*, no. 2 (1980): 106–10.

²² Mackie, "Women's Groups in Japan," 106–10.

it was our male relatives and friends, who were spear-heading the invasions of Korea, China, and other Asian countries. It was they who burned, killed, robbed, and violated women. But now we must refuse to allow our men to be sent to these countries, whether as economic invaders or for sexual exploitation. Without this determination, we ourselves will never become liberated persons. We want to express our sincere apologies to our Asian sisters. We want to learn from and join in their struggles.²³

The association claimed that the oppression of women in other Asian countries was firmly related to the oppression of Japanese women. The traditional, sexual double standard, along with Japanese racist attitudes towards other Asians, allowed Japanese men to go on sex-tours, while it proscribed Japanese women's sexual freedom and forced them to keep their virginity until marriage. Because of their total economic dependence on their mates, women did not have a voice, for example, in their husbands' decisions to hire prostitutes.

The feminists in the Asian Women's Association (AWA) also tried to locate the Japanese abortion issue within the general framework of population control politics in Asia. Under the name of development aid from industrial countries, women in poor Asian countries were sterilized and used as guinea pigs for dangerous contraceptives such as Depo Provera. In 1982 Japan became the second largest donor, next to the United States, contributing 9 percent of the total worldwide population control assistance.²⁴ While the Japanese government prohibits the contraceptive pill for Japanese women except for therapeutic reasons, it permits at least six Japanese pharmaceutical companies to export pills to other Asian countries. One of them markets prostaglandin which is not approved in developed countries. Thus women in Japan and other Asian countries do not have the right to determine whether or not to bear children on their own. Given these factors, women in Asia, in both developed and developing countries, are able to build a coalition on the issue of reproductive freedom.

In 1974 this group successfully organized a campaign in coalition with Korean, Thai, Taiwanese, and Filipino feminists, against sex-tourism among Japanese businessmen in Asian countries.²⁵ AWA significantly curtailed sex-tourism by pushing the Diet to pass a law to restrict travel

²³ Asian Women's Association, "Declaration of the Asian Women's Association—March 1, 1977," *Asian Women's Liberation* (AWL), no. 7 (1986): 2.

²⁴ Bo Gunnarsson, "Japan's Abortion Law and Birth Control Ambitions in the Underdeveloped Countries in Asia," in *Poverty and Population Control in the Third World*, ed. Lars Bondestam and Staffan Bergstrom (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 125–36.

²⁵ Japanese feminists, for example, organized the demonstrations at the Haneda airport in Tokyo against the men who were going on sex tours to Korea. The Korean feminists welcomed these tourists by anti-sex-tourism demonstrations at the Kimpo airport in Seoul.

agencies from promoting these practices. It has also been exploring, in coalition with feminists in other Asian countries, the issue of population control in Asia. In the 1980s the focus has been on discouraging the importation of Southeast Asian women as prostitutes and mail-order brides. Women in the association have been seeking an alliance with Asian women who are exploited by Japan's capitalist invasion of Asia.²⁶

As the Japanese expand economically over Asia, women's oppression increases in those countries. This economic development based on the Western capitalist model destroys women's role as major contributors in the traditional rice crop economies, especially in the Southeast Asian countries and excludes women from the benefits of modernization; furthermore women are not given access to modern education and training for modern agricultural technology. In some areas, women are relegated to work in subsistence agriculture and the informal economy. In other areas, even if women are integrated into the modern economy, they are utilized as cheap deskilled labor for multinational corporations or exploited as prostitutes in flourishing sex industries.²⁷

The *uuman libu* feminists in the 1970s pointed out that the oppression of women in other Asian countries was related to the oppression of Japanese women and people of Asian descent, notably the Korean-Japanese in Japan. Under the discriminatory, sexist, racist Immigration Control Law, third generation Korean residents could not obtain citizenship, since it did not allow citizenship to children born to Japanese mothers married to non-Japanese fathers. Japanese feminists organized a campaign against this sexist law, which finally was abolished in 1984.

Japanese discriminatory attitudes toward other Asians were rooted in Japan's colonialism and continued until Japan's defeat in World War II. As the Immigration Control Law shows, such racism is firmly intermingled with sexism. Both sexism and racism, deeply imprinted in Japanese society, insure Japan's economic invasion and sexual exploitation of Asia. If Japanese feminists seek a coalition with other Asian feminists, we cannot avoid the issue of development in the Third World nor the problems of immigrant workers and residents in Japan. The foundation of the Asian Women's Association is certainly the first step toward coalition building.

²⁶ For their stance on sex-tourism see, "Prostitution Tourism," *AWL* no. 3; "Sex-Tourism and Militarism," *AWL* no. 6.

²⁷ For a feminist analysis of the issues of women in development, see Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970). On women in Southeast Asia in particular, see, "Changing Roles of SEA Women," *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, no. 66 (January-February 1979); "Tourism: Selling Southeast Asia," *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, no. 78 (April 1978); and Aiwa Ong, "Industrialization and Prostitution in SEA," *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, no. 96 (January 1985): 2-6.

In the 1980s American feminism, maturing out of its early, white, middle-class ethnocentrism, has reached the stage of integrating diverse women of different classes, races, cultures, ethnicity, and sexuality. They now are beginning to recognize the plurality of feminisms. Furthermore, they are seeking a coalition with international feminists, especially their Third World sisters, in an effort to build a global feminism. As women living in an advanced capitalist society, Japanese women now have much in common with American women and are in a position to learn from the experiences of American feminists who have lived in an advanced capitalist society for a long time.

On the other hand, Japanese feminists have been fighting against distinctive characteristics of Japanese society as a latecomer into the world capitalist system. They have been struggling against sexism shaped by both capitalism and the remnants of semifeudalism in a dual economy. This feminist stance based on the unique position of Japanese women provides some useful insights for women in the Third World who are also suffering from a dual economy and rapid invasion of the world capitalist market system.

Women in each society should build their own feminism based on the peculiarities of their culture, heritage, tradition, and socioeconomic conditions. Yet, at the same time, women's situations become increasingly similar because of the nature of international capitalist expansion. I end this essay hoping that we, Japanese feminists, will develop a more comprehensive theory to articulate our shared cultural and historical peculiarities and our commonalities shared by women under capitalism in order to bridge the gap between women in advanced industrial societies and women in the Third World.